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East Timor Human Rights Centre

CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN EAST TIMOR

SUMMARY REPORT
of Human Rights Violations in East Timor
January to September 1996

16 October 1996 Ref: SR1/96

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1996, serious and systematic abuses of fundamental human rights have continued in East Timor. The 1996 violations follow the numerous violations which occurred in 1995, which the US State Department described as one of the worst years for violations in East Timor. The East Timor Human Rights Centre's Summary Report of Human Rights Violations in East Timor documents violations of fundamental civil and political rights between January and September 1996.

1996 has seen a high level of arbitrary arrests, particularly of young East Timorese, and systematic torture of those arrested. Arrests are frequently made by members of the Indonesian military and not by the Police as required by the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP). The ETHRC believes at least 289 East Timorese may have been arbitrarily arrested and is concerned that the pattern of arrests indicates an Indonesian military strategy to weaken the Resistance by arresting as many East Timorese as possible.

Details of the methods of torture used against East Timorese in detention are graphic, including electric shock, burning prisoners with cigarettes, beating them with gun butts and sticks, covering their heads with plastic bags and submerging them in a water tank.

The ETHRC received reports alleging the extra-judicial execution of up to 10 East Timorese. The execution of Paolo dos Reis was investigated by Indonesian authorities, resulting in the conviction of an Indonesian soldier, who was sentenced to 8 months imprisonment for manslaughter. However, as far as the ETHRC is aware, 9 other suspected executions have not been investigated by Indonesian authorities.

Riots which broke out in Baucau on 10 June are believed to have been provoked by an Indonesian soldier insulting the Catholic religion. The incident led East Timorese youths to

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conduct a peaceful demonstration which became violent when Indonesian security forces started shooting at demonstrators. It is believed that live ammunition was used by the security forces instead of plastic bullets which Indonesian troops have been instructed to use since the Dili Massacre of 1991. Approximately 165 East Timorese were arrested during the riots, and during house to house searches which followed. The ETHRC received reports that some of the detainees were brutally tortured, sustaining serious injuries such as broken hands and feet.

Many East Timorese were injured during the riots and up to 3 East Timorese may have been killed. It appears that unwarranted force may have been used, however, the riots still have not been investigated by the Indonesian authorities. To date, the names of 21 East Timorese convicted following the riots have been released but serious concerns have been raised that their trials may have been unfair.

One East Timorese was killed and many others injured when prisoners in Dili's Becora prison rioted on 30 January. It is believed the prisoners were demonstrating against the torture of a prisoner. 53 people were wounded but only 7 of them were permitted to go to the hospital while 46 had to stay at the prison with serious injuries.

The people of East Timor are living in great fear. This is illustrated by the ETHRC's Report which confirms that they are regularly subjected to intimidation, beatings, rape and other acts of repression by the Indonesian authorities.

Large numbers of East Timorese have attempted to leave East Timor, either by seeking asylum at foreign embassies or fleeing by boat to Australia, risking their lives and abandoning hope of ever seeing their families and homeland again. Since January, 96 East Timorese have sought asylum in embassies in Jakarta, 50 of whom have left for political asylum in Portugal. 25 East Timorese were arrested or questioned after their asylum bids, even though Indonesian authorities have stated that East Timorese are free to leave if do not wish to stay in Indonesia. Foreign embassies have gone to extraordinary lengths to prevent East Timorese seeking refuge and embarrassing the Indonesian government, increasing the presence of Indonesian security forces outside the embassies and erecting barbed wire on fences. That so many East Timorese are fleeing is a measure of the desperation and defiance of the younger generation.

The East Timor Human Right's Centre's Summary Report raises grave concerns for the East Timorese people who continue to be subjected to violations of their fundamental rights. The Report highlights the need for the Indonesian government and governments world-wide to take urgent action to address the human rights situation in East Timor.